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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000686

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTRE D'IVOIRE: EIGHTH MEETING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP

REF: A. ABIDJAN 568

[1](#)B. ABIDJAN 417

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. At the eighth meeting of the International Working Group (IWG), Prime Minister Banny gave a long, evasive presentation seeking to reassure the group that he is determined to succeed in bringing the country to elections, while IWG members tried to pin him down on why so little progress is being made. Banny did make important points about how he plans to proceed with identification, how he believes the dispute over the National Assembly should be resolved, concessions he believes the rebel New Forces (FN) have made on disarmament, and steps he is taking to pave the way for World Bank funding for disarmament. He was joined by Guillaume Soro, FN leader and second ranking minister in the government, but Soro made only two brief interventions. The commanders of the UN and French peacekeeping forces expressed optimism about disarmament but concern about recent internal divisions within the FN. In the communique from this meeting, the IWG sought to reassert that the National Assembly's mandate expired in December while also demanding that the former deputies be paid equally, for undertaking missions of peace and reconciliation around the country. A confrontation may be building within the group between the French, who want to start sooner rather than later discussing what to do this October, when it is increasingly clear that there will be no elections in sight, and the South Africans (and perhaps other African countries as well) who want to avoid this subject as long as possible. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The IWG held its eighth meeting in Abidjan June 23, co-chaired as usual by Congolese Foreign Minister Rodolphe Adada and UN Special Representative of the Secretary General in Cote d'Ivoire (SRSG) Pierre Schori. In attendance were French Cooperation Minister Brigitte Girardin; Ghanaian Foreign Minister Nana Akufo-Addo; Niger's Foreign Minister Aichatou Mindaoudou; South African Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota; ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas; UN High Representative for Elections in Cote d'Ivoire (HRE) Gerard Stoudmann; and representatives from Benin, Guinea, Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, the EU, the African Union, and the International Organization of French Speaking Countries.

[1](#)3. (C) As has become an IWG tradition, the meeting led off with a review of the last month's developments in the peace process by Prime Minister Banny, followed by questions and answers. This time Banny's presentation lasted some three hours, and he was flanked by Guillaume Soro, leader of the rebel New Forces (FN) and second ranking minister in Banny's

government. Banny was characteristically verbose, rambling, vague and evasive. As IWG members sought to pin him down on why so little progress is being made in the peace process, Banny clung to three main generalities: he is determined to succeed, he is committed to building consensus, and he is confronted by so many obstacles and problems that he can only tackle them one at a time as they come along, leaving the rest to be dealt with in due course.

14. (C) Banny did make a number of important points:

-- He promised that after what he called a successful pilot citizen identification project last month (ref A), the identification process would swing into full gear the following week. (Note: As of mid-week there are no signs of movement on this yet.)

-- Banny indicated that he wants to proceed with voter registration on the basis of Certificates of Nationality. (Note: As explained ref B, the Certificate of Nationality is only an intermediate step in the identification process. It is accepted as proof of identity, for getting a driver's license or a passport, for example, but not proof of citizenship. It would be a major concession on the part of the FN and the political opposition to go forward with disarmament and elections without the final step -- citizen identification cards. President Gbagbo's FPI (Ivoirian Popular Front) party has fought for over ten years to deny these cards to Northerners, and this issue was a major cause of the 2002 attempted coup and rebellion.)

-- Banny said he wants Ivoirians to only need to come in once, to be identified and registered to vote at the same time. (Note: One of UN HRE Stoudmann's assistants later told us this will not be possible -- identification lists will

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need to be compiled and collated into a single data base before voters can be registered.)

-- Banny called the bitter dispute over whether opposition members of the former National Assembly should be paid (septel) a purely political issue which the political parties should resolve among themselves. He tried to distance himself from this contentious issue by stating that it was not his problem.

-- However, Banny repeated several times that the Assembly's mandate expired in December, and there is no legal basis for extending it. He swore that he would submit no legislation to the Assembly, in particular the 2006 budget. The budget, he said, has been approved by the Cabinet and as far as he is concerned that is enough to implement it. (Note: By our reading of articles 42 and 80 of the Constitution, it is the President, not the Prime Minister, who submits the budget to the National Assembly after the Cabinet approves it.)

-- Banny said the FN has made two important concessions on disarmament: decoupling the commencement of disarmament from the commencement of dismantling of the militias, and allowing UN and French peacekeeping forces to enter FN preregroupment sites to verify that preregroupment is in fact proceeding. (Note: Preregroupment is the first step in the disarmament process. Soldiers from both sides are currently supposed to be assembling at designated sites under their own commanders. Later they are to come under the control of international peacekeepers, and eventually surrender their weapons -- septel).

-- Banny expressed confidence that the bond issuance to pay for clearing Cote d'Ivoire's arrears with the World Bank, which ends June 30, would be fully subscribed. He revealed (and the World Bank representative at the IWG confirmed) that Cote d'Ivoire has increased its request for World Bank funding for disarmament from \$80 million to \$100 million, and that a mission would travel to Washington this week to

discuss the details of this funding.

15. (C) Soro sat impassively through most of Banny's presentation, making only two brief interventions. He confirmed that the FN would allow international verification of the FN preregistration sites, and he put in a plea for the opposition deputies to be paid. Soro did not comment on Banny's plan to register voters based on Certificates of Nationality rather than citizen identification cards.

16. (C) Prime Minister Banny's long presentation left time for only relatively short briefings on the security situation by General Fernand Marcel Amoussou, acting Commander of the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI) and General Antoine Lecerf, Commander of the French Licorne peacekeeping force; and on preparations for elections by UN HRE Stoudmann. The force commanders reported that the security situation was generally quiet over the past month, and that disarmament is moving ahead, though slowly. Both expressed concern that recent internal divisions within the FN could result in only part of the FN disarming. Stoudmann came under sharp questioning from IWG members about a recent letter from the Gbagbo-controlled National Statistical Institute (INS) to the chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), asserting that the INS will go ahead on its own with preparing voter registration lists. Stoudmann called the letter a provocation based on a deliberate misinterpretation of the Pretoria Agreements, and he and the CEI intended to ignore it.

17. (C) The biggest issue for the IWG to deal with in its communique was the National Assembly. In the days leading up to the meeting, opposition parties were saying loudly and repeatedly that the only reason why they were boycotting Assembly sessions was because the IWG said in its January communique that the Assembly's mandate had expired. Therefore, they said, it was up to the IWG to do something about that fact that FPI deputies, attending the sessions, were being paid, while boycotting opposition deputies were not. The IWG decided on language indirectly reasserting that the Assembly has no mandate, by referring to the January communique and UN Security Council Resolution 1633 and by calling the deputies "former deputies," while at the same time demanding that all former deputies be paid equally for undertaking missions of peace and reconciliation round the country. (Note: The January communique recommended that the Prime Minister make use of the former deputies for such missions, and the day before the June IWG meeting Banny

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announced that he would do so.)

18. (C) Other than that, the communique contained predictable language expressing concern about delays in identification and disarmament, asserting that the CEI, not the INS, is solely responsible for voter registration, and warning that those who block the peace process may be subject to UN sanctions.

19. (C) Comment. The IWG is growing increasingly impatient with Banny's evasive answers and vague assurances. A confrontation may be building within the group between the French, who want to start discussing what to do this October, if as is likely there are no elections in sight, and the South Africans (and perhaps other African countries as well) who want to avoid this subject as long as possible. End Comment.

Hooks